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SUBJECT: Paktika Province Gets a New Governor

Ref: Kabul 101

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Paktika province's new governor, Abdul Qayum Katawazay, arrived in Sharana February 14 against the backdrop of a suicide attack in the provincial capital two days earlier. Provincial, district, and central government officials; former governor Khpalwak; as well as tribal and religious leaders from the province attended a ceremony for the new governor's welcome. Katawazay sees improving security as his top priority and a prerequisite for greater progress in economic development and reconstruction. Katawazay, a native of Paktika, assumes his position after having served as National Security Directorate commander in Kandahar province, where, according to press reporting, Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission may have found evidence of his involvement in human rights abuses. He will need to engage effectively with all the Pashtun tribes of Paktika, overcoming concerns that he may favor his own tribe or region, if he is to succeed as governor of this isolated and challenged province. End summary.

Governor Stresses Security; Leaders call for Education

¶2. (U) The new governor of Paktika province, Abdul Qayum Katawazay, arrived in the provincial capital Sharana on February 14. Provincial and district government officials, tribal and religious leaders, ANSF, PRT, and U.S. maneuver battalion members welcomed him in a ceremony on the governor's compound. Former governor Mohammad Akram Khpalwak, Paktika Wolesi Jirga member Nadir Khan Katawazay, parliamentary Kuchi representative for Paktika Abdullah Jan, and IDLG official Qutbudin accompanied Katawazay to Sharana for the ceremony.

¶3. (U) After a brief introduction by the IDLG representative that emphasized the constitutional nature of the appointment of governors, Katawazay gave short remarks stressing his experience in security matters and identifying bringing security to Paktika as his top priority. Former governor Khpalwak gave a longer speech emphasizing President Karzai's support to Paktika during Khpalwak's time as governor and ANSF and CF cooperation for the benefit of the province. Several of the speakers stressed the need for education in Paktika, noting that large numbers of schools in the province have been destroyed or closed. Paktika NDS commander Yasin pointed out that the people themselves must choose to support the educational opportunities that GIROA is providing. MP Nadir Khan called on the people to help reduce civilian casualties by denying refuge to Taliban in their communities. Provincial Council Chairman Nawab Waziri and others pledged the cooperation of the leaders and people of Paktika with the new governor.

Suicide Attack Asserts Taliban Presence in Sharana

¶4. (U) Katawazay arrived against the backdrop of a suicide bombing on February 13 at an ANP checkpoint at the side entrance to the governor's compound that killed one ANP and injured eight others. The local national most seriously injured in the incident is a bodyguard and cousin of former governor Khpalwak and Paktika Director for Administration Hazrat Mohammad. The injured were brought to the Sharana Forward Operating Base (FOB), where the four most seriously injured were stabilized and later flown to Bagram Air Field for advanced treatment.

¶5. (U) This attack, carried out by an elderly man on foot wearing a suicide vest, took place the day after tribal leaders from around the province first assembled in Sharana to welcome Katawazay, who, for reasons described as technical, did not reach Sharana that day. PRT members, who had also come to the governor's compound to greet Katawazay, used the opportunity to talk with the tribal leaders. The tribal leaders said irrigation and agricultural projects are the people's greatest needs, followed by women's health facilities. (Note: There are no female doctors in Paktika. End note.) These are high priority areas for the Provincial Development Committee and the PRT's project planning.

Tribal Leaders Dubious but Ready to Cooperate

¶6. (SBU) Asked their thoughts about the new governor, the Omna district administrator said Katawazay is "one of us" so he won't be so inclined to use the job "to fill his pockets." (Note: This

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district administrator, Nader Khan, was reappointed to Omna district in January after having been fired from the same job for corruption; he has recently departed the district again under new allegations of corruption. Contacts in Governor Khpalwak's office told PRT that no one else would take the job following the destruction of the district center and clinic by Taliban in late November. End note.) Some of the other tribal leaders made audible comments indicating they felt less optimistic about Katawazay; some appeared concerned that, being a native of Paktika, he might favor his own tribe and region over others. All the leaders agreed, however, that they would cooperate with the new governor.

Governor Ready to Cooperate with PRT and CF

¶7. (U) On February 16 PRT Commander and State Department representative held a brief introductory meeting with Katawazay at his office. Katawazay expressed his readiness to cooperate closely with PRT and CF and repeated that his top priority for Paktika is to improve security, given that greater progress in development will be impossible without this. He agreed with PRT's suggestion to travel with the PRT to the province's districts to establish strong relationships with the district leaders and the tribes.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) As reported reftel, there was opposition within Paktika and among its MPs to Katawazay's nomination. According to press reports, Katawazay's appointment also faced opposition from Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, which raised allegations of prisoner abuse from Katawazay's NDS tenure in Kandahar. If Katawazay engages energetically with all of Paktika's five major tribes in his first days in office and takes their concerns into account, we believe he can overcome the doubts that have been raised and become an effective governor. PRT will cooperate closely with him to that end and will monitor his progress. End comment.

Biographical Note

¶9. (U) Katawazay was born in 1965 in Paktika Province. He is a native of Seygana village in Paktika's Khair Kot district. He belongs to the Mahmudkhel sub-tribe of the Suleimankhel (Pashtun) tribe. He graduated from the military college in Kabul in 1986 and then worked for a time with the National Directorate of Security (NDS) before working for the Ministry of Defense. Since 2001 he has served as the NDS chief in five different provinces: Paktika (2001-2002); Zabul (2002-2003); Wardak (2003-2004); Ghazni (2004-2005); and Kandahar (2005-2008). He speaks both Pashto and Dari and is fluent in Arabic and Urdu. His English is limited.

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